

TROOP B

The Missouri State Highway Patrol was created by the 56th General Assembly in 1931. Governor Henry S. Caulfield named Lewis Ellis as the first superintendent. After his appointment, Colonel Ellis visited several Eastern States in the summer 1931, reviewing highway patrol systems, so that Missouri might build on a sound foundation derived from the experience of the older organizations. Based on those findings, a non-partisan Highway Patrol was established with 55 men being selected from thousands of applicants. Among the 55 new officers, 10 were natives of the Northeast Missouri area. After an intensive six weeks training at the St. Louis Police Academy, the new police force was ready for duty in November 1931. The state was divided into six troop areas. The troops were designated as Headquarters Troop in Jefferson City, Troop A in Kansas City, Troop B in Macon, Troop C in Kirkwood, Troop D in Springfield, and Troop E in Sikeston.

Originally, 22 counties in the Northeast corner of the state were included within the Troop B boundaries. The troop was first manned by nine of the original 55 members. The complement of Troop B officers assigned included: the troop commander, Captain Schuyler S. French, stationed in Macon; First Sergeant Benjamin O. Booth stationed in Macon; Trooper Elwood B. Robinson stationed in Chillicothe; and Trooper Clyde W. Kinder stationed at Hannibal. The remaining five officers were natives of the area and assigned back to the troop-- Trooper William J. Ramsey, of Marceline, who was assigned to Chillicothe; Trooper G. Russell Minor, of Prairie Hill, and Trooper Clarence O. Miller, of Unionville, who were assigned to Macon; Trooper C. Maurice Parker, of Trenton, who was assigned to Kirksville; and Trooper Roy L. Keller, of Lewistown, who was assigned to Hannibal. All 55 of the patrolmen wore boots manufactured in the Troop B area by the Central Shoe Company of Moberly.

Those officers fortunate enough to be assigned cars for patrol received 1931 Ford Model A Roadsters. Troopers Minor and Kinder rode Harley Davidson motorcycles and Captain French had a 1931 Chevrolet sedan. The troopers patrolled designated routes primarily along major highways, and worked a minimum of 12 hours a day. They received two days off each month and were allotted a salary of \$125 per month. Patrol areas generally covered 150 miles or more and included routes such as, Hannibal to Macon and back along U.S. Highway 36, or Kirksville to Trenton to Princeton, then east on Missouri Highway 4 (now U.S. Highway 136) to Lancaster and back to Kirksville. The officers had no radio communication. They relied on a system of stops along their routes (service stations, restaurants, police stations, and sheriff's offices) where telephone messages were taken for the officers.

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Troop B's first headquarters was two rooms in the State Highway Department offices on the second floor of the Masonic Building in downtown Macon. The Patrol next moved its headquarters into a small wooden building, now designated as the "sign shed", behind the District 2 Highway Department office on U.S. Highway 63 in 1935. Upon completion of the new Highway Department Building in 1937, the Troop B office was relocated in the basement of that building. On September 14, 1937, 4.2 acres of ground were purchased from George and Lillian Pohlman, and an adjoining 2.4 acres were purchased from Mrs. Lena McKay. The total purchase price for the seven acres of prime land was \$1,000. On this site, construction was completed on March 5, 1938, and Troop B began operations in the first troop headquarters building constructed in Missouri specifically for that purpose. Troop B also established radio transmitter station KHPB at the new headquarters, which greatly modernized communications.

In June 1932, Troop B acquired four new members. They were Troopers Kelso, Davis, Breid, and Leak. Trooper Miller contracted an illness and was forced from service. First Sergeant Booth was transferred from Macon to Columbia to work in the Headquarters Troop. Sergeant Booth, in a later encounter with a robbery suspect, became the first member of the Missouri State Highway Patrol to be killed by gunfire in the line of duty. Trooper Ramsey was brought from Chillicothe to Macon and promoted to first sergeant. Trooper Minor was transferred to Troop A, and Trooper McCann was brought from the Headquarters Troop to Macon. In a short time, another change took place, sending Trooper Robinson from Chillicothe to Moberly, and transferring Trooper Austin from Troop A to Chillicothe. Trooper McClard came to Macon from Troop C, Trooper Duncan was transferred to Hannibal from Troop C, and Trooper Breid was transferred from Macon to the Headquarters Troop in Columbia.

In June 1933, Governor Guy B. Park appointed Colonel B.M. Casteel to succeed Colonel Ellis as superintendent of the Highway Patrol. Colonel Casteel was reappointed to that office four years later by Governor Lloyd C. Stark.

Thirty-five new troopers were appointed to the Patrol in 1935. From this group Troop B received six of the officers. They were: Troopers Runkle and Updegraff assigned to Macon, Troopers Patton and Sontheimer assigned to Hannibal, Trooper Nall assigned to Chillicothe, and Trooper Kanan assigned to Kirksville.

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The troop grew slowly but steadily in the 1930s under several commanders. Captain French was dismissed in May 1933 as a result of budget cuts. His replacement, Captain Lewis M. Means resigned in 1937, to become Adjutant General of Missouri. William J. Ramsey, who had been troop sergeant since 1932, became captain in 1937, and was appointed acting superintendent of the Patrol on December 23, 1940. Sergeant Victor Kelso was named acting commander of Troop B until a permanent Patrol commander was named and Capt. Ramsey returned to Macon on November 30, 1941.

The new organization compiled an enviable record in the early years. Records indicate many accomplishments, some of which were the recovery of 350 stolen cars and the correction of 70,000 light violations in the first six years of its existence.

Many new duties have been delegated to the Highway Patrol throughout its history, and in 1942, the Patrol took over the operation of weigh stations from the Highway Department. Troop B assumed control of the weigh stations at Macon and Hannibal, and in the late 1940s, a third weigh station was constructed at Moberly. Later, the Patrol would administer driver license examinations, supervise motor vehicle inspection stations, and perform many other traffic related tasks.

Tragedy struck Troop B on Sunday, December 12, 1943, when Trooper Ross S. Creach, a 24-year-old officer who had been on the Patrol for one year, became the first officer in Troop B to be killed in the line of duty. Tpr. Creach was killed instantly when he was struck by a car as he directed traffic around a disabled tractor-trailer truck on U.S. Highway 36 between Shelbyville and Linton. The driver of the car was arrested and later admitted he had been drinking prior to the accident. He was sentenced to four years in prison for manslaughter as a result of the death of Tpr. Creach.

Post World War II growth of the Patrol resulted in the re-organization of troop areas on August 15, 1946. Troop B was reduced in size to its present 16 counties, losing the counties of Pike, Audrain, Mercer, Grundy, Livingston, and Carroll. Through the 1940s, commanders of the troop were Captain J.F. Shaw (a native of Marion County), Harry A. Hansen, G. Russell Minor (a native of Chariton County), and Thomas Whitecotton (a native of Monroe County). Whitecotton became troop commander on October 14, 1949, when Minor became the first officer of the Patrol to hold the newly created rank of Major. He was indeed the state's one and only Major Minor.

The 1950s saw continued growth in Troop B and the return of another native son to the post of troop commander, when on January 1, 1950, Captain George W. Pate took over the reins of the troop. Capt. Pate was originally from New Cambria. He was succeeded by G. Russell Minor, who requested to return to

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Macon when Capt. Pate was assigned to the Kansas City area in 1955. Captain Earl L. Davis and Captain T.R. Taylor also were troop commanders at Macon in the late 1950s.

Troop B had outgrown its headquarters building by the 1960s, and on December 10, 1964, a new headquarters building was dedicated just west of the site of the original headquarters, and the site currently being used. Captain Samuel S. Smith, troop commander at the time, later served as superintendent of the Patrol from 1973 to 1977.

Troop B entered the decade of the 1970s under the leadership of another Captain Smith, J.C. Smith. It was during his tenure that tragedy struck the troop again. On June 12, 1970, Trooper William R. Brandt, 23, a two-year veteran on the Patrol and a native of Brunswick, was killed when his patrol car was slammed against the Middle Fork Bridge abutment on U.S. Highway 36 west of Macon by a tornado. The trooper had been tracking the tornado and attempting to warn the city of Macon of its approach. The force of the storm and impact with the bridge abutment were so great that Brandt's patrol car was literally ripped in half.

Troop B also lost the roof of the headquarters building due to the tornado, and the 325-foot transmitting tower was toppled across U.S. Highway 36. This was the third time the Troop B radio tower had been damaged by high winds.

Shortly after Captain Charles E. Ray became commander of Troop B in 1973, an unusually late blizzard paralyzed the area. Ten inches of snow fell on April 9, and it was whipped into gigantic drifts by winds of up to 73 miles per hour. The blizzard closed every major highway in the troop except U.S. Highway 61. Many motorists and several troopers became stranded and were forced to seek refuge in nearby homes. Numerous vehicles, abandoned in drifts, were completely covered by snow and later damaged as snow removal equipment struck them.

Troopers in Troop B have always been involved in criminal investigations, and in 1977, the addition of a satellite criminal laboratory at the headquarters in Macon greatly enhanced their efforts in that field.

The 1980s saw five troop captains assigned at Troop B: Grover C. Johnson Jr. (11-01-1979 to 1-01-1981), Edward E. Kelsey (1-01-1981 to 7-01-1985), William B. Darnell (7-01-1985 to 6-15-1988), Sherrill E. East (6-15-1988 to 9-01-1988), and C. Lloyd Meyer (9-01-1988 to 4-01-1992).

In the summer 1987, construction was begun on a 4,000-square-foot addition to the existing building. The added area included much needed office space, as well as a four-position indoor range. Construction was completed and the addition was occupied in the spring 1988.

Following the retirement of Captain Meyer, Troop B saw five other troop captains in the 1990s. They were Weldon Wilhoit (4-01-1992 to 4-01-1993), who was later appointed to superintendent; Harold Elder (10-15-1993 to 8-31-1995);

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Dale Penn (9-01-1995 to 8-31-1999); Lieutenant Danny Middleton was named acting commander (9-01-1999 to 9-30-1999); and John Elliott (10-01-1999 to present).

During the fall 2001, Troop B conducted its first Community Alliance Program, developed to provide personal interaction between community citizens and the Patrol. It was held for six weeks and attended by 16 citizens from the Troop B area.

In 2002 several building renovations to the Troop B Headquarters building were completed. Renovations included relocating a break room, making more clerical space a reality, and updating the large conference room. Construction and maintenance employees Ron Deskin and Roy Barton completed all of the construction projects.

On May 12, 2002, Trooper Nathan J. Shinkle, Trooper Chad W. Walton, and Sergeant Roger P. Gosney responded to the east bank of the Middle Fabius River west of Colony, Missouri. A subject was reported to have been swept into flood waters. All three officers entered the cold water and assisted Knox County Deputy Robert Becker with the rescue. The Patrol presented Tpr. Shinkle, Tpr. Walton, and Sgt. Gosney with Meritorious Service Awards.

On May 10, 2003, tragedy struck several small northeast Missouri communities as a large tornado tore its way across Troop B. The town of Canton, Missouri, was the area where the most storm damage occurred. The powerful storm ripped its way through the city destroying numerous houses, local businesses, vehicles, and buildings. It also disrupted electrical and telephone service. Fortunately, no serious injuries were reported--due most likely to early warning systems activated by the city. Troop B command staff responded to the tragic event by immediately dispatching approximately 25 officers to assist the city with traffic control, search for missing residents, and provide security for the area.

During 2004, Troop B officers were called to assist with the investigation and security of three aircraft crashes resulting in the deaths of 16 individuals. One of the plane crashes, which occurred in rural Adair County on October 19, 2004, involved a commercial aircraft transporting 16 passengers and two crew members. The aircraft had departed St. Louis, Missouri, en route to Kirksville, Missouri. Of the 15 individuals on board the aircraft, only two survived the fiery crash. For several days, officers worked closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Transportation Board, Adair County authorities, and numerous media outlets. The two other crashes involved privately owned aircrafts, which resulted in the deaths of three other individuals.

Corporal Nicholas D. Berry was named 2004 Officer of the Year for the Patrol. Cpl. Berry was recognized with this award due to his work ethic and diligence.

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The Patrol recognized Corporal Steven V. Wilhoit with a 2005 Meritorious Service Award for his actions on July 2, 2005. Cpl. Wilhoit responded to a residence in Bevier, MO, after a domestic disturbance in Bevier, MO. A man was holding two knives and acting suicidal. Cpl. Wilhoit, while negotiating with the subject, was able to disarm the subject, who was then taken into custody.

On March 12, 2006, Troop B officers were called to assist citizens of Monroe and Randolph counties following the aftermath of a large tornado. The tornado destroyed numerous buildings and homes, and was responsible for the deaths of four individuals.

In spring 2006, a video surveillance system was installed at the troop headquarters complex. The system has 27 cameras, which provide added security to the headquarters, and is monitored by communications personnel.

Troop B officers kept quite busy this past year with criminal investigations and assisted investigators with the Division of Drug and Crime Control with 14 death investigations, seven of which were classified as homicides, and two officer-involved shootings. On October 17, from information gained by Putnam County law enforcement agencies and a follow up investigation, officers were able alert Killeen, Texas, authorities of a homicide. Taking detailed information and quick interviews enabled Texas law enforcement authorities in locating the body of a victim and make a quick arrest of the perpetrator.

From its humble beginning in 1931, Troop B has grown in size as well as assignment and responsibility. In 2006, the troop is manned by a captain, 3 lieutenants, 15 sergeants, 12 corporals, and 36 troopers, for a total of 67 uniformed members. There are 49 civilian employees comprised of 14 radio personnel, six commercial vehicle officers, nine driver examiners, four motor vehicle inspectors, three driver examination station clerks, two maintenance personnel, one mechanic, eight clerical, and two chemists. The task of traffic and criminal law enforcement is accomplished with tools unheard of in 1931. Those nine original members would have been amazed at such law enforcement instruments as radar, breathalyzers, polygraphs, fingerprint comparators, computers, radios, etc. But, with the simple tools available, their hands, wits, and raw courage, they carved a quick, but well deserved reputation of efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness with the public, which future members will enjoy for years to come.

The many officers who have served in Troop B, through their years of dedicated and professional service, have won the respect of the citizens of

Northeast Missouri. Theirs is a proud history, which, for more than half a century, has been so deeply entwined with the history of the area they have become inseparable.